

---

**NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE**

---

**INTRODUCTION**

The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is a key information Agency within the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Statistical data on U.S. agriculture are essential for the orderly development of production and marketing decisions by farmers, ranchers, and other agribusinesses. The U.S. food and fiber system totals over 14 percent of the gross domestic product and employs more than one out of every six employees in the United States. Agricultural data series are also important for monitoring the ever-changing agricultural sector to make and carry out agricultural policy relating to farm program legislation, commodity loan and insurance programs, foreign trade, the environment, agricultural research, rural development, and related activities.

Thousands of farmers, ranchers, agribusinesses, and others voluntarily respond to nationwide surveys about crops, livestock, prices, and other agricultural activities. These surveys are supplemented by field observations, objective yield counts and measurements, and administrative data to provide reliable information. Annually, estimates for about 120 crops and 45 livestock items are published in approximately 425 reports prepared by NASS's Agricultural Statistics Board. NASS's statistical research and service program supports NASS's annual statistics program and census of agriculture activities by improving the statistical methods and related technologies used in developing agricultural statistics.

**LEGISLATIVE MANDATE**

The foundation of NASS began with the establishment of USDA in 1862. Agricultural supply information was one of the purposes for the new Department. The first official report on the condition of crops began in July 1863. The basic, mission-oriented program continues today in the USDA forecasts and estimates provided by the NASS Agricultural Statistics Board. NASS's responsibilities are authorized under the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 and other sections under Title 7 U.S.C., Agriculture; Chapter 55, Department of Agriculture; Section 2204, General duties of the Secretary; advisory functions; research and development.

Responsibility for the quinquennial census of agriculture program, which provides comprehensive information about the Nation's agriculture down to the county level, was transferred from the Department of Commerce to the Department of Agriculture in 1997. NASS thereby assumed responsibility for the 1997 Census of Agriculture and subsequent censuses and special studies. NASS's responsibility to conduct the census of agriculture is authorized under Public Law 105-113, the Census of Agriculture Act of 1997 (Title 7 U.S.C. 2204g).

The Agency staff includes about 1,350 full-time Federal and State employees, one-third at Headquarters and two-thirds in the field. The NASS program utilizes 46 State Statistical Offices (SSO's) serving all 50 States and Puerto Rico. These SSO's are operated under cooperative funding arrangements with State Departments of Agriculture and/or land-grant universities.

This arrangement efficiently serves the agricultural data needs at both the State and Federal levels, eliminates duplication of effort, provides State input, maintains national consistency, and minimizes overall costs to Federal and State Governments. NASS also performs important reimbursable survey work for other Federal, State, and producer organizations as well as provides technical assistance for agricultural statistics programs in developing countries.

The structure of farming and of the agricultural industry has changed dramatically since the initial crop reports were issued nearly 140 years ago. However, the need for accurate, timely, and impartial statistical information on the Nation's agriculture has become even more important as the Nation has moved from subsistence agriculture to a highly complex, industrialized agricultural industry producing food and fiber for the world market.

## **CUSTOMERS AND STAKEHOLDERS**

NASS stakeholders are its data providers, customers and data users, its staff, cooperators, and the public. The ultimate beneficiaries of NASS's statistical program are the American people, whose well-being is improved by well informed public and private decision making.

NASS has identified its primary customers to be farmers, ranchers, and agribusinesses, who not only provide data to NASS, but use NASS information to routinely make their production and marketing decisions. NASS shapes its program and products principally to serve these key decision makers: the White House and USDA program managers; the U.S. Congress; other Federal agencies; State and local government officials; farmers and ranchers; and environmental, agribusiness, consumer, and other groups who use and are interested in agricultural statistics.

## **PARTNERSHIPS AND CROSSCUTS WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND DEPARTMENTS**

As the primary statistical Agency for the USDA, NASS services the data needs of many agencies inside and outside of the Department. This interaction contributed significantly to the NASS strategic plan. NASS data are an important part of the World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates, issued by the World Agricultural Outlook Board, that monthly measure total world supplies and demand for major commodities. The NASS data play a very important role in the Department's purchases of food for the school lunch program. USDA relies on NASS data for important policy issues such as the Export Enhancement Program and the management of the Conservation Reserve Program. NASS data are used administratively to establish Federal Market Order milk prices which ultimately determine the price every consumer pays for milk and dairy products. USDA's Risk Management Agency uses NASS data to administer the crop insurance program. Wage rate data from the labor survey are used by the Department of Labor to set the adverse effect wage rates. Grazing fees for publicly owned land are set using a formula based on NASS estimates of grazing fees on private land along with prices received data. The grazing fees are jointly administered by the Forest Service in USDA and the Department of the Interior.

Partnerships have been in place with State Departments of Agriculture and land-grant universities through cooperative agreements since 1917 to ensure statistical service meets State and local as well as national needs without duplication of effort. This coordination maximizes benefits while

minimizing respondent burden and costs to the taxpayers. NASS also considers the thousands of voluntary data suppliers as partners in the important task of monitoring the Nation's agricultural output, facilitating orderly and efficient markets, and measuring the economic health of those in agriculture.

NASS uses numerous forums to obtain program content and customer service feedback. NASS has sponsored Data User Meetings for many years which are a primary source of customer input that keeps the NASS agricultural statistics program on track with the needs of the user community. Their responses played a vital role in developing the original NASS strategic plan. Subsequent meetings have featured the NASS strategic plan as a means of generating discussion of the NASS program and the plans themselves. The transfer of the census of agriculture program to NASS brought with it an Advisory Committee which now provides guidance on the entire agricultural statistics program. Also, the mission area has formed a National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board which provides input for all REE agencies. In early 1997, the mission area sponsored a stakeholders meeting to evaluate the strategic plans of REE and the four agencies which helped shape the current NASS strategic plan.

## **KEY EXTERNAL FACTORS**

Customers and stakeholders identified the following trends and external factors as having important implications for the NASS program in the next decade:

- Continued concentration in agricultural production, leading to fewer, larger, and more vertically integrated farms;
- Declining voluntary cooperation as requests for information increase;
- Rising expectations from the public for accuracy, timeliness, and relevancy of statistics;
- Fewer employees with a background and education in agriculture;
- Changing lifestyles in rural America, including more off-farm work, and a decline in the share that agriculture represents in rural communities;
- Explosive changes in information technology;
- An increasing need for sharing of information across agencies;
- Rising use demands for new kinds of information faster and in different forms.

Producers must be able to adapt to a more market-oriented farm policy, shifting trade opportunities, and changes in the structure of agriculture, such as vertical integration and concentration. Accurate and timely statistical data and economic analysis will help producers and policy makers respond quickly to economic, social, and environmental changes that affect production and the sale of agricultural products, both domestically and globally. NASS must be able to use innovative data collection methods, such as e-government, to help reduce survey respondent burden and improve voluntary cooperation. Advances in information technologies should be adapted to increase information sharing electronically, to meet the rising demands for new information, increase employee productivity, and continue to meet the public's high expectation of accurate, timely, and relevant agricultural statistics. NASS will employ a diverse, highly technical and competent workforce that will have the ability to fully utilize all available resources to provide top quality agricultural statistics and service.

## MISSION

The NASS mission is to provide timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U. S. agriculture.

## GOALS

The NASS goals are consistent with those of the other agencies in the Research, Education and Economics mission area. They also fully support the goals of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. NASS's specific objectives describe the Agency's contribution to the general goals. In relation to the USDA strategic plan, NASS goals 1 and 5 advance USDA's first goal; NASS goals 2 and 3 promote parts of USDA's second goal; NASS goal 4 furthers USDA's third goal; and NASS goals 1 and 5 supports parts of USDA's goal 4. NASS's goal 6, focused on management issues, fully supports USDA's goal 5. It is imperative for NASS to deliver high-quality, objective, relevant, timely, and accurate statistics on the priority issues outlined in the REE and NASS goals and objectives. NASS statistics have relevance to more than one goal and objective. Areas of work include, but are not limited to: domestic crop, livestock, and poultry production statistics, crop conditions and progress, numbers of farms, state and county agricultural statistics, rural demographics, dairy and egg products, cold storage, aquaculture, agricultural prices, farm labor, grain stocks, livestock slaughter, processing statistics, crop and livestock agrichemical usage and practices. The goals and objectives in this strategic plan are consistent with the level of appropriations expected by the agency. Basic data supplied by NASS provide the information necessary for informed decision making by public officials and private interests. These decisions will ultimately determine the success in achieving desired outcomes.

**GOAL 1: To promote an agricultural food and fiber system that is productive and highly competitive in the global economy.**

**Objective 1.1:** Timely, accurate, and impartial agricultural statistics are available to all at a publicized date and time and are used throughout the agricultural sector to evaluate supplies and promote competitive prices for U.S. commodities around the world.

**Time Frame for Completion:** On-going throughout each year.

**Strategies for Achieving the Objective**

Conduct surveys to obtain important statistical data for agricultural commodities as well as for economic and environmental information.

- Issue timely and accurate reports of official estimates that are useful for the efficient and effective marketing of U.S. agricultural outputs and in formats most useful to data users.
- Systematically analyze each step of data collection, processing, and estimation of production and price statistics to evaluate the quality, accuracy, timeliness, and frequency of NASS reports.

- Evaluate trends and changes in production agriculture and adjust NASS statistics program accordingly.
- Use the Agricultural Statistics Board to assure objective evaluation of survey indications, to provide unbiased official USDA estimates, and to publicize the NASS release policy and annual release calendar to the public.
- Ensure that the statistics program and security procedures safeguard the confidentiality of individual reported data and official statistics from improper disclosure and protect impartiality.

### **Performance Measures**

- National production statistics will annually cover 97 percent of all agricultural cash receipts in the National Income Accounts.
- Over 90 percent of data users rate NASS data series as important or essential to the marketing of agricultural products.
- The report release calendar is published for all to see before beginning an annual program cycle.
- NASS reports are complete, contain no data errors, and meet scheduled release dates in 99 percent of releases.
- There are zero instances of impropriety regarding data security prior to the appointed date and time of an official release.

## **GOAL 2: To promote a safe food system and a secure agricultural production system.**

**Objective 2.1:** Provide meaningful statistical projections and pre- and post-harvest data for use in evaluating risk assessments relative to both food safety and food security.

**Time Frame for Completion:** Periodically as needed for monitoring purposes.

### **Strategies for Achieving the Objective**

- Conduct surveys to provide needed chemical use data on types and amounts of chemicals applied on crops, livestock, and farmland by producers and associated economic information to evaluate related economic importance.
- Conduct surveys and field visits to enable the Agricultural Statistics Board to forecast crop yields and livestock productive capacity for a meaningful period into the future and quickly respond to emergency data needs such as those resulting from floods, droughts, and freezes.
- Provide important management practice and economic data which are useful for decision making and risk assessment.

- Conduct surveys to measure and report chemicals applied to agricultural products during storage, packing, and shipping.
- Make meaningful data readily available to all who need the chemical use information for business and policy decisions.

**Performance Measures**

- Provide data on agricultural practices related to food safety issues.
- Provide timely agricultural production forecasts and estimates.
- Provide survey data showing percentage of U.S. farmland employing Integrated Pest Management practices.
- Respond to all emergency data needs, within the NASS budgetary capability.

**GOAL 3: To provide a healthy population through improved nutrition.**

**Objective 3.1:** Provide statistical advice, consultation, and services to USDA and State agencies concerned with health, nutrition, and education when seeking new data or the statistical analysis of existing data for policy decisions.

**Time Frame for Completion:** As needed.

**Strategies for Achieving the Objective**

- Provide technical assistance and guidance, as needed, to the REE mission area, other USDA policy officials, and others who may request assistance and serve as a reliable source of statistical expertise and survey capabilities.
- Work closely with customers to ensure statistical needs are met.

**Performance Measure**

- Provide professional statistical advice on survey methodology, questionnaire design, and data summarization are provided, as needed, with up to 20 hours of consulting service per request without charge.

**GOAL 4: To foster an agricultural system that protects natural resources and the environment.**

**Objective 4.1:** Provide statistical data on agricultural chemical use, production practices, land productivity, and integrated pest management practices so informed decisions can be made regarding stewardship of America's rural resources and the environment.

**Time Frame for Completion:** Periodically as needed for monitoring purposes.

**Strategies for Achieving the Objective**

- Conduct surveys to provide needed information concerning quantities of chemicals applied to agricultural commodities, including livestock and facilities.
- Supply important information on land use and productivity for use in environmental monitoring efforts.
- Supply important economic information relevant to policy and production decisions associated with chemical use and integrated pest management on U.S. farms and ranches.
- Supply information relevant to measuring the adoption of integrated pest management practices in production agriculture.

**Performance Measures**

- Statistical program addresses data needs for policy and economic decisions relating to stewardship of natural resources and the environment.

**GOAL 5: To increase the capacity of communities, families, and individuals to enhance their economic well-being and quality of life.**

**Objective 5.1:** Provide detailed production, supply, economic, and demographic data, in partnership with State Departments of Agriculture, land-grant colleges and universities, and other cooperators, to enhance National, State, and local information on U.S. Agriculture and facilitate locality-based policy and business decisions.

**Time Frame for Completion:** On-going surveys and the census of agriculture program at 5-year intervals.

**Strategies for Achieving the Objective**

- Conduct the census of agriculture to provide detailed data at the National, State, County, and local levels on the characteristics of America's agricultural sector.
- Improve coverage of minority farm operators in the census of agriculture.
- Report the results of the census in a timely and user-friendly manner to enable decision making concerning localities across the U.S.
- Conduct census of agriculture follow-on surveys and other economic surveys to monitor the economic status of those who operate and work the Nation's farms and ranches, and provide needed economic data for policy analysis.
- Involve and maintain partnerships with State Departments of Agriculture, land-grant

colleges and universities, and other cooperators, local program supporters, and industry for program development and evaluation.

### **Performance Measures**

- The census of agriculture will maintain the current definition of a farm and important historical data series while addressing emerging new issues needed for evaluating the agricultural sector.
- The census of agriculture will improve coverage of all farms and commodities, especially minority-operated farms compared to previous censuses.
- The number of cooperative agreements and memorandums of understanding between NASS and outside partners will reflect a strong commitment to State and local data needs.

**GOAL 6: Fully utilize the capabilities of a diverse workforce and available resources to provide top quality agricultural statistics and service.**

**Objective 6.1:** Respond to customer needs and provide excellent service.

**Time Frame for Completion:** Continuous.

### **Strategies for Achieving the Objective**

- Meet the requirements of the September 1993 Executive Order regarding a customer service plan and respond to customer requests within 2 working days.
- Promote public and customer awareness of NASS's role in preparing comprehensive statistics on the Nation's agricultural industry.
- Investigate new ways to enhance the dialogue between NASS and data users regarding the importance of existing data series and needs for new data.
- Introduce new products and services and redesign existing products to meet changing customer expectations.
- Examine the relevancy of statistical products by profiling the content, scope, frequency, and coverage provided compared to user needs in order to improve customer awareness concerning NASS products and services and to facilitate easy access to official NASS data.
- Enhance NASS publications by adding more information, graphics, map products, geo-referenced files, and remote sensing images. Be responsive to new data needs for specific components of the agricultural economy (e.g., county-level data, watershed data, rural data, data on subgroups in agriculture, environmental data, data on sustainable agriculture).



**Performance Measures**

- Over 90 percent of data users surveyed are satisfied or very satisfied with NASS service.
- New data products and services are introduced to fulfill customer requests.
- A Customer Satisfaction Index measures Agency's customer service performance compared to performance with other Agencies.

**Objective 6.2:** Employ a diversified and technically competent staff, treat employees fairly and with respect, foster leadership, and manage resources efficiently.

**Time Frame for Completion:** Continuous.

**Strategies for Achieving the Objective**

- Use the Civil Rights Action Team (CRAT) Implementation Plan as a guide to identify factors related to quality, quantity, and timeliness for implementation and enforcement of all applicable policies, rules, memorandums, etc. developed as a result of the CRAT report.
- Support cooperative programs with 1890 land-grant, Hispanic, Native American, and other minority educational institutions to assist them in training and to help NASS recruit qualified minorities.
- Utilize and promote student assistants, cooperative students, stay-in-school and other employment programs that assist in recruitment of highly qualified, diversified, and technically competent staff.
- Maintain a healthy and safe environment for employees, with modern equipment and comfortable furnishings. Make effective use of flexible work schedules and work locations.
- Develop innovative and flexible training programs to meet individual needs. Offer and encourage statistics, computer, and communication skills training. Promote staff knowledge in the full range of agricultural and rural issues. Build experiences and versatility through staff mobility.
- Participate in national and international forums where concepts and methodologies are presented. Utilize cooperative agreements, exchange programs, contracts, and other interactive vehicles with academic, professional, and subject matter experts to expand staff capabilities.
- Conduct an organizational climate survey at regular intervals and take action on issues identified.
- Recognize outstanding contributions by NASS employees.

- Promote trust, respect, teamwork, and communication. Involve the staff at all levels in program decisions.
- Train and develop managers to apply leadership practices that treat employees fairly and with respect.

**Performance Measures**

- All program needs are met and NASS meets Department guidelines regarding diversity in staff.
- Organization climate surveys show fewer than 15 percent of employees have low morale.
- Zero substantiated EEO complaints are filed by NASS employees.
- Training and career development of NASS employees will be an integral part of NASS's human resource management plans.

**Objective 6.3:** Ensure an effective information resource management system to maximize productive capability and facilitate communication for employees.

**Time Frame for Completion:** Continuous.

**Strategies for Achieving the Objective**

- Continually monitor and upgrade, as needed, the NASS distributed client/server computing and equipment using leading-edge relational data base technology.
- Implement security technologies and security system architectures.
- Increase use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), remote sensing, and geo-referencing devices.
- Promote the use of the Internet and e-government for data collection and data release.
- Use the USDA wide-area communications network to implement new functions such as remote LAN management, video conferencing, optical scanning and document archiving and retrieval systems, GIS, and data sharing.
- Organize all relevant data in a highly secure integrated data warehouse and transaction data bases which can be accessed and shared through powerful analysis tools. When appropriate, these data bases should contribute key components to the USDA data architecture.
- Continually monitor and upgrade all field LAN servers, as needed, to enhance the system's capacity to handle a high volume of computer-assisted telephone interviews and promote effective and efficient development and release of official statistics.

- Continually monitor and upgrade all LAN systems to facilitate the migration of any new technology to the USDA Technical Architecture.
- Work closely with the ARS, Administrative and Financial Management Division to make sure administrative and financial services to NASS are efficient, effective, and consistent with Departmental standards and guidance.

### **Performance Measures**

- NASS field LAN servers have capacity to handle over 300,000 computer assisted telephone interviews.
- No report due dates are missed because of equipment failure.
- Less than 10 percent of employees cite the physical work environment as a negative work factor and an impediment for doing their job well.
- There are no breaches of computer security resulting in disclosure of confidential data or loss/modification of sensitive data.
- Plans for implementing Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA) and the Freedom to e-File Act are completed.

## **LINKAGE OF GOALS TO ANNUAL PERFORMANCE PLAN**

The NASS annual performance plans will draw upon performance measures described in this strategic plan to monitor progress toward NASS objectives in support of the general goals. These measures gauge how well the basic statistical data for agriculture provided by NASS meet the needs of both public and private decision makers. Their actions, based on information available to them, will ultimately determine the success of the goals and outcomes desired by NASS, REE, and USDA.

Goals 1, 2, and 4 are linked to the Agricultural Estimates and Statistical Research and Service budget program activities. Goal 5 is linked to the following budget program activities: Agricultural Census, Agricultural Estimates, and Statistical Research and Service. Goal 3 is supported through the NASS reimbursable program. Goal 6 is linked to Goals 1-5 allocations and activities.

## **LINKAGE OF GOALS TO THE DEPARTMENTAL GOALS**

The USDA has identified five strategic goals as the critical concerns to be addressed through the various agencies of the Department. The goals of NASS are consistent with those of the other REE agencies and support the five goals of the Department as follows:

- Goal 1: Expand economic and trade opportunities for U.S. agricultural producers. Supported by NASS Goals 1 and 5.
- Goal 2: Promote health by providing access to safe, affordable, and nutritious food. Supported by NASS Goals 2 and 3.
- Goal 3: Maintain and enhance the Nation's natural resources and environment. Supported by NASS Goal 4.
- Goal 4: Enhance the capacity of all rural residents, communities, and businesses to prosper.

Supported by NASS Goals 1 and 5.

- Goal 5: Operate an efficient, effective, and discrimination-free organization. Supported by NASS Goal 6.

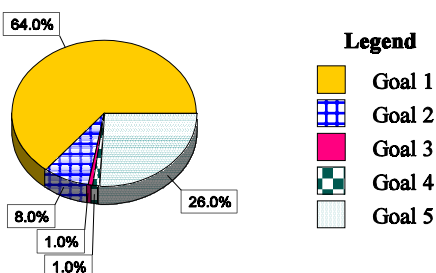
## RESOURCES NEEDED

Resource allocations for NASS in FY 2000 are shown in the following chart as they apply to achievement of the five program goals. Resources associated with Goal 6 are allocated to Goals 1-5.

Highly skilled employees are required by NASS in the areas of agricultural statistics, survey methodology, mathematical statistics, computer sciences, and technical and general support. In addition, trained interviewers under contract to NASS are critical to accomplish stated goals. Personnel are dependent upon reliable computer equipment and networks for the completion of their duties. Periodic adjustments to the budget for pay increases and inflation are necessary to sustain service levels expected by data users. Significant changes from previous resource demands resulted from the transfer of the census of agriculture from the Bureau of the Census to NASS and to meet new data requirements on Integrated Pest Management and chemical use.

In the long term, NASS resource needs are influenced by several major factors. The census of agriculture collects and provides comprehensive data every 5 years on all aspects of the agricultural economy. Because of this cyclical schedule, different activities are conducted each year which require varying resources. Attainment of NASS's annual performance measure of producing statistics which cover 97 percent of all agricultural production receipts and responding to changes in the agricultural sector which result in different data needs will require NASS to secure resources for those areas currently under-served. Finally, NASS will continue to be in a constant state of reengineering due to changes in methodology and technology. NASS's ongoing efforts to streamline information management to increase the efficiency, timeliness, and accessibility of information will require resources which are difficult to estimate due to the rapid changes in technology and changing costs for hardware and software.

**Resource Allocations for  
NASS in FY 2000**



## **PROGRAM EVALUATION**

The assessment of NASS performance, under its strategic plan, is highly dependent on the judgement of data users and customers as to the value and relevance of its products and services. For example, NASS statistics contribute to the orderly function of production and marketing systems in the agricultural sector. Timeliness is easily measured by the percent of pre-announced due dates met, but the degree to which NASS contributes to the outcome of an efficient market is in the judgement of the data user. NASS will obtain these judgements through customer satisfaction surveys conducted on a periodic basis. These will be aligned with the annual budget and performance planning cycle. A comprehensive program evaluation is completed every census cycle to ensure the NASS statistical program coverage of agricultural commodities is complete and meets the changing needs of data users. Other assessments of NASS contributions toward the desired outcomes specified in this and the REE strategic plan will be solicited from subject matter experts, such as public and private economists, the media, farmers, and ranchers. For many years NASS has held data user “listening” sessions in various locations around the U.S. In addition, NASS periodically solicits technical and program reviews by economic and statistical experts from academia and other data knowledgeable organizations. The establishment of the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics in 1999 will be particularly important in broadening and shaping the demographic aspects of NASS survey and census activities. Input from these sources had significant impact on this strategic plan and these program evaluations will continue to influence future NASS strategic planning. NASS has learned through continuous interaction with data users over the years about the increasing and changing needs for statistical information regarding agriculture and related issues.

## **ROLE OF EXTERNAL ENTITIES**

A large number of people and organizations influence and are influenced by NASS’s activities. In order to determine how NASS could better serve these groups, it was necessary to identify the issues and concerns of the principal stakeholders. The results of the NASS interaction with these customers and other stakeholders are reflected in the plan. No paid contractors or consultants were used in the preparation of this strategic plan.